



MULTI CREATION
TURNING DREAMS INTO REALITY

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

TO ACCOMPANY:

Full Planning Application

TO:

Reading Borough Council

PROPOSAL:

***Change of use of ground floor from bar/nightclub (Sui Generis) to off-licence/retail use
(Class E(a))***

SITE ADDRESS:

5-6 Friar Street, Reading, RG1 1DB

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1. Introduction

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared in support of a Full Planning Application at 5–6 Friar Street, Reading, RG1 1DB.

The application relates solely to the ground floor of the premises, currently occupied by a bar/nightclub known as Neighbourhood, and seeks permission for its change of use to an off-licence/retail use (Class E(a)), together with the installation of two additional security shutters internally behind the existing front windows.

One internal security shutter already exists within the frontage. The proposed shutters will follow the same principle and will be positioned behind the glazing rather than externally mounted.

The proposal seeks to provide an active retail use appropriate to the site's town-centre location while respecting the character and appearance of the existing building and the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area.

2. Site and Surrounding Area

The application site is located on the northern side of Friar Street within Reading town centre.

The ground floor is currently occupied by Neighbourhood, operating as a bar/nightclub. The premises have a long-established history of bar and hospitality use and were formerly known as Matchbox. The Council's 2020 delegated officer report recorded the ground floor as being in use as a bar/nightclub known at that time as Matchbox.

Friar Street has a strong commercial character comprising retail, food and drink, leisure and hospitality premises. The Council's previous assessment identified public house/bar premises immediately adjoining the site, reinforcing the established commercial and evening-economy character of this part of the town centre.

The site lies within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area and is in close proximity to Reading Town Hall. Accordingly, careful consideration has been given to ensuring that the proposed works respect the established character and appearance of the area.

3. Existing and Proposed Use

The existing ground-floor premises currently operate as a bar/nightclub under the name Neighbourhood.

It is also relevant that planning permission PL/95/0757 authorised the change of use of the premises from a Building Society (Class A2) to a Café/Bar, then falling within Class A3.

Following amendments to the Use Classes Order in 2020, former Class A3 restaurant and café uses were incorporated within the broader Class E, principally Class E(b), while the proposed off-licence/retail shop falls within Class E(a).

Accordingly, insofar as the lawful use benefits from the former A3 permission, the historically approved A3 use and the proposed retail use now fall within the broader Class E commercial use class, albeit under different parts of that class. This provides further support for the compatibility of the proposed retail use with the established commercial function of the premises.

Notwithstanding this historic position, the current application seeks full planning permission to provide certainty for the proposed use.

The proposed ground-floor layout provides a conventional retail arrangement comprising:

- customer retail floor area;
- shelving and display areas for dry goods;
- designated beer, wine and spirits display areas;
- sales counter;
- associated storage; and
- sanitary accommodation.

The submitted licensing plan confirms the intended arrangement, including dry-goods shelving, dedicated beer, wine and spirits areas, sales counter and associated storage.

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Alcohol will be sold for consumption away from the premises, with the sale of alcohol separately controlled through the appropriate premises licensing regime.

The proposal will therefore maintain a customer-facing commercial activity at ground-floor level appropriate to the established function of Friar Street.

4. Planning History

The property has a long-established commercial planning history, including:

PL/20/1041 – Approved 29 September 2020
Installation of new extract.

The associated officer report identified the ground floor as a bar/nightclub known at the time as Matchbox and recognised the commercial character of the surrounding area.

PL/07/0785 – Approved 6 February 2008
New decking area with pergola and Jumbrella to flat roof, internal alterations to existing staircase and change of front kitchen into bar area.

PL/07/0956 – Approved 8 October 2007
Re-branding of pub with various new illuminated signage.

PL/01/0559 – Approved 16 October 2001
New shopfront and signage and redecoration of front elevation.

PL/01/1249 – Approved 16 October 2001
Externally illuminated fascia signage.

PL/01/0729 – Withdrawn 1 November 2001
Change of name from "The Old Society" to "Bar 4" and erection of new signage.

PL/95/0757 – Decision dated 12 July 1995
Change of use and extension from Building Society (Class A2) to Café/Bar (Class A3), together with alterations to the front elevation.

Earlier applications include advertisement and frontage works under references PL/95/0567, PL/90/0835 and PL/89/0415.

The planning history demonstrates the long-standing commercial use of the ground floor and its adaptation over time to accommodate changing commercial requirements.

5. Principle of Development

The application site occupies a highly accessible position within Reading town centre and forms part of an established commercial frontage.

The proposed Class E(a) off-licence/retail use is considered appropriate to this context. It will maintain an active ground-floor commercial use, provide direct customer interaction with Friar Street and make effective use of existing commercial floorspace.

There is also a clear historic relationship between the premises and commercial uses now encompassed within Class E. In particular, the 1995 permission established an A3 Café/Bar use, with former A3 restaurant and café uses subsequently incorporated within Class E following the 2020 amendments to the Use Classes Order.

The proposed development therefore represents a continuation of the site's established commercial function rather than the introduction of an unrelated use.

The proposal is considered compatible with the established function of Friar Street and will contribute towards the continued vitality and viability of Reading town centre.

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6. Design and Security

The proposal adopts a restrained approach to physical alteration.

The existing front windows and principal composition of the frontage will be retained. The proposed works comprise the installation of two additional security shutters internally behind the existing front windows, supplementing the one existing internal shutter.

Locating the shutters internally avoids the need for prominent external shutter boxes or projecting security equipment and retains the established appearance of the window openings.

The shutters will be open during trading hours and will therefore not interfere with the operation of the retail premises or customer access.

This arrangement provides an appropriate level of security for the proposed off-licence while minimising its visual impact upon the building and Friar Street.

7. Heritage and Conservation

The application site lies within the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area. The proposal has therefore been designed with particular regard to preserving the character and appearance of the area.

No extension or alteration to the scale or massing of the building is proposed as part of the ground-floor change of use.

The internal positioning of the security shutters is particularly relevant in this context. Rather than introducing prominent external roller shutters, the proposed shutters will sit behind the existing glazing, allowing the established frontage to remain the principal visible architectural element.

This represents a proportionate intervention that facilitates the continued commercial occupation of the premises without materially altering its external character.

The approach is considered consistent with the objectives of Policy EN3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, concerning Conservation Areas, and Policy CC7, concerning design and the public realm.

The Council previously considered development at the property under application PL/20/1041 and concluded that, due to its discreet siting, the development assessed under that application did not conflict with Policies CC7 or EN3.

8. Shopfront and Town Centre Character

The proposed off-licence will maintain a customer-facing commercial use at ground-floor level.

The existing glazed frontage provides a visual relationship between the premises and Friar Street, which will be retained. The internal positioning of the proposed security shutters ensures that no additional external security structures are introduced to the frontage.

The proposal is consistent with the objectives of the Council's Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD, which seeks the sensitive integration of security measures, and Policy OU5, relating to appropriately designed shopfronts and security features.

The proposal will consequently maintain the commercial function of the frontage while respecting the architectural character of the building.

9. Amenity

The application site is situated within an established town-centre commercial environment surrounded by a variety of commercial uses.

The Council's previous assessment of the site recognised that the premises are surrounded by commercial premises including bars, restaurants and shops.

The proposed off-licence represents a conventional retail operation. Unlike the existing bar/nightclub operation, customers will not principally remain within the premises for the consumption of alcohol or entertainment.

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Alcohol purchased from the premises will be intended for consumption away from the site, with matters specifically relating to alcohol sales controlled separately through the premises licensing regime.

Given the established commercial character of the locality, the proposed use is considered compatible with its surroundings.

10. Access and Inclusive Design

The existing ground-floor access arrangements from Friar Street will be retained.

The internal layout provides clear customer circulation between the entrance, retail shelving and sales counter.

The security shutters will be positioned internally behind the front windows and will remain open during trading hours; they will therefore have no adverse impact upon customer access.

The proposal does not materially alter the established relationship between the premises and the public highway. Detailed accessibility requirements associated with the internal fit-out will be addressed in accordance with the relevant Building Regulations.

11. Transport and Sustainability

The site occupies a highly sustainable town-centre location with convenient access to Reading's pedestrian network, local bus services and Reading railway station.

The development involves the reuse of existing commercial floorspace and does not create additional built floorspace.

The proposed retail use is therefore appropriately located to encourage access by walking, cycling and public transport and represents an efficient reuse of an existing town-centre premises.

12. Deliveries and servicing

Due to the strict town centre Red Route regulations and pedestrianisation windows enforced by Reading Borough Council, servicing for this heavily restricted stretch of Friar Street will be managed strictly according to the time of day to ensure total compliance and avoid camera-enforced penalties.

The proposed delivery options are structured as follows:

- **Out-of-Hours Servicing (Before 10:00 AM or After 6:00 PM):** Standard delivery vehicles will access the front of the property directly. This section of Friar Street operates a car-free restriction between 10:00 AM and 6:00 PM. Outside of these restricted hours, vehicles will utilise the designated on-street loading bays located on the south side of Friar Street.
- **Daytime Servicing (Between 10:00 AM and 6:00 PM):** To comply with the daytime pedestrianised zone, all deliveries during these hours will utilise the dedicated commercial loading bays located on Greyfriars Road or Garrard Street. Goods will then be transferred to the storefront via manual handling equipment.

This dual-option approach ensures that operations can be maintained efficiently without causing disruption to the public realm, bus corridors, or pedestrian traffic.

13. Internal Refuse Zone

- **Highways Protection:** In accordance with council highways regulations, no waste storage containers will be positioned permanently on the public highway, pavements, or external alleyways of Friar Street.
- **Site Boundary Containment:** All waste containment will be managed internally within the application site boundary.
- **Internal Front-Door Storage:** To optimize operations and minimize public disruption, a dedicated internal refuse zone is established inside the property, located immediately adjacent to the front door.
- **Containment Specification:** This internal space will accommodate 2x bins for Dry Mixed Recycling (DMR), 2x bins for General Waste, x1 Bin for Food Waste and x1 Bin for Glass Recycling (or equivalent pre-paid commercial trade sacks).
- **Environmental Controls:** The front internal storage area features smooth, washable surfaces, adequate ventilation to prevent odour, and is sealed against pest entry to protect the retail storefront.

Management, Presentation & Servicing Protocols

- **Authorized Carrier:** Premises management will maintain a commercial contract with a licensed waste carrier or Reading Borough Council Trade Waste Services for routine collections.

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- **Rapid Presentation Window:** Storing the bins internally next to the front door allows staff to instantly wheel them directly onto the Friar Street kerbside immediately prior to the allocated time window by the waste contractor. The door to the refuse zone will have a digital lock to allow service providers to retrieve the bins.
- **Time-Restricted Compliance:** In line with Reading Town Centre public realm policies, bins will never be left out overnight. Bins will be wheeled back inside the front door within 30 minutes of being emptied.
- **Missed Collections:** If a collection is missed, waste will immediately remain inside the internal front-door storage area and will not be left on the public highway.

14. Relevant Planning Policy

The proposal has been considered having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework, the Reading Borough Local Plan and relevant supplementary planning guidance.

The principal policies relevant to the proposal include:

Policy CC7 – Design and the Public Realm

The proposal retains the established frontage and limits physical intervention to sensitively located internal security measures.

Policy EN3 – Enhancement of Conservation Areas

The development retains the principal architectural character of the frontage and is considered to preserve the character and appearance of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area.

Policy OU5 – Shopfronts and Cash Machines

The proposed internal shutters provide appropriate security without introducing visually intrusive external shuttering.

Policy CR2 – Design in Central Reading

The development makes productive use of existing commercial premises and maintains an appropriate relationship with the public realm.

Policy CR7 – Primary Frontages in Central Reading

The proposed retail use maintains an active commercial ground-floor frontage appropriate to the town-centre location.

Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD

The internal shutter arrangement responds to the Council's guidance regarding the sensitive integration of security measures into commercial frontages.

15. Conclusion

The proposal represents an appropriate reuse of established commercial ground-floor premises within Reading town centre.

The change from the existing Neighbourhood bar/nightclub to an off-licence/retail shop will maintain an active commercial use appropriate to the established character of Friar Street.

The site's planning history also demonstrates a long-standing commercial use, including the 1995 permission for a Café/Bar under the former Class A3. Following the restructuring of the Use Classes Order, former A3 restaurant and café uses were incorporated within the broader Class E, while the proposed retail/off-licence use falls within Class E(a). This provides additional support for the compatibility of the proposed use with the established commercial function of the premises.

The physical works are limited to two additional security shutters positioned internally behind the existing front windows, supplementing the existing internal shutter. This provides the necessary security without introducing prominent external structures or materially altering the established frontage.

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Overall, the proposal is considered to:

- maintain an appropriate ground-floor commercial use;
- make effective use of existing town-centre floorspace;
- retain the established appearance of the frontage;
- provide a discreet and proportionate security solution;
- preserve the character and appearance of the Market Place/London Street Conservation Area; and
- maintain the existing access arrangements.

The development is considered to accord with the relevant objectives of the Reading Borough Local Plan, the Design Guide to Shopfronts SPD and national planning policy.